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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7946
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1946
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1371
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4929
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4893
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8459
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6021
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1523
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1718
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0374
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3914
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1876
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 RANGOON 000585

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, EEB/TPP/ABT/ATP - JANET SPECK
USDA FOR OSEC AND APHIS
USDA FOR FAS/DLP/HWETZEL AND FAS/ICD/LAIDIG
BANGKOK FOR USDA/FAS, ECON OFFICE, USAID
DEPT PLEASE PASS TO USAID - CHERYL JENNINGS
PACOM FOR FPA
TREASURY FOR OASIA: SCHUN

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [ETRD](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: CHALLENGES TO PLANTING RICE IN THE DELTA REMAIN

REF: A) Rangoon 579 B) Rangoon 371 C) Rangoon 331

RANGOON 00000585 001.2 OF 004

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Cyclone Nargis, with its up to 12-foot high waves, not only destroyed much of the rice farmland in the Irrawaddy Delta, but also washed away farm implements, including seeds, draft animals, and plows. Farmers in the delta have received some assistance from the Burmese Government, UN agencies, and NGOs, primarily in the form of seeds, power tillers, and water buffalo. During a July 8-12 trip to the delta, we observed that while some farmers had begun to plow their land and plant rice, not all of the land will be planted by August 1, the recommended date for planting monsoon crop. Farmers highlighted several challenges inhibiting their ability to plant rice: lack of diesel for the power tillers; insufficient numbers of draft cattle; weak or sick cattle; inadequate seed stocks; and lack of salt-resistant rice seeds. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Between July 8-12, a USAID/OFDA officer, USAID/RDMA Health officer, Econoff, Poloff, and local staff member traveled to Labutta and Ngapudaw Townships in the Irrawaddy Delta. The team visited ten villages - Ye Wei, Zin Ywe Kyi, Sin Chay Yar, Ka Pyo, Gant Eik, Yin Dee Lay, and Sa Kyin in Labutta Township and Thaketa, Gwe Chaung, Kan Seik in Ngapudaw Township (Ref A).

View from the Rice Bowl

¶3. (SBU) Cyclone Nargis, which struck Burma May 2-3, destroyed much of the farm land in the Irrawaddy Delta, Burma's largest rice producing area. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the storm flooded more than one million acres of rice farm

land in seven townships in Irrawaddy Division, affecting more than one million farmers and day laborers (Ref B). In addition to the loss of usable farm land, farmers also lost farm implements, including more than 250,000 water buffalo and draft cattle, 100,000 plows, and seed stocks. In the July 10 UN Revised Flash Appeal, the FAO requested more than \$40 million to rehabilitate affected rice farms. The FAO and Burmese Ministry of Agriculture recommended that the latest farmers should plant monsoon crop is August 1, leaving little time to rehabilitate farms and provide farmers with necessary tools.

¶4. (SBU) During our trip to the delta, we observed thousands of acres of rice paddy in various stages of cultivation. In the northern part of Irrawaddy Division, farmers already plowed their fields and were systematically planting seeds. As we approached the storm-affected areas, we saw many rice paddies overrun with grass and weeds, collapsed paddy embankments, few water buffalo and draft cattle in the fields, and substantially fewer farmers planting rice than in previous seasons. Many of the rice paddies appeared unusable in the short-term; farmers were using machetes to cut down weeds before they could even start plowing.

¶5. (SBU) Despite the appearance of the rice fields, village leaders told us that many of the farmers, unlike the fishermen, were able to return to the fields to resume their livelihoods after the cyclone. Recent monsoon rains had washed away some of the salt water intrusion, making the soil more suitable for rice growing, they noted. Almost all of the village leaders reported that farmers would be able to cultivate all of the fields, provided they had the necessary seeds and implements. Most villages predicted they would plant seeds by August 1. Privately, however, they admitted it would be a challenge to plant all fields, with most villagers estimating they could plant between 50-75 percent of available land. Villagers

RANGOON 00000585 002.2 OF 004

in Kan Seik, the most vulnerable village we visited, admitted that they would be unable to plant all 2,000 acres of farmland in the village due to lack of seeds and water buffalo for plowing. At best, the farmers could plant 400 acres, although they acknowledged that they could realistically plant only 50 acres of rice.

Assistance Provided

¶6. (SBU) All of the farmers we spoke with indicated that they had received some livelihood assistance, usually in the form of seeds and farming equipment. Their accounts demonstrated that distribution of assistance varied greatly by village (see chart below). Larger villages, particularly those with trade links, such as Gant Eik, Sa Kyin, or Thaketa, received more assistance from a wider variety of sources. Leaders in these villages told us that frequent trips to Labutta or Ngapudaw yielded more assistance. Thus, the smaller, poorer villages or those located far from a major town received less aid because they were unable to make the right connections, they commented.

Farming Implement Donations As of July 12, 2008		
Village	Donated Goods	Donor
Ye Wei	Rice Seeds	MinAg
Zin Ywe Kyi	Rice Seeds	Private Dutch Company
	8 Water Buffalo	Min. Livestock
	1,000 bottles Diesel	Min. Energy
Yin Dee Lay	100 Baskets seeds	MinAg
Sa Kyin	400 baskets seeds	IDE
	30 Water Buffalo	Min. Livestock
	20 Tractors	MinAg
Gant Eik	2,000 baskets seeds	MinAg

	6,000 bottles diesel	Min. Energy
Gwe Chaung	1,500 baskets seeds	MinAg
	17 tractors	MinAg
Kan Seik	1 tractor	MinAg
	4 Water Buffalo	Min. Livestock
	30 gallons diesel	Min. Energy
	200 baskets seeds	MinAg
Thaketa	30 tractors	MinAg
	11 tractors	Private company
	1,500 baskets seeds	MinAg
	2,000 gallons diesel	Min. Energy
Sin Chay Yar	50 baskets seeds	MinAg
Ka Pyo	6 Water Buffalo	Min. Livestock
	4 tractors	MinAg
	172 baskets seeds	MinAg

17. (SBU) According to village leaders, the majority of farming

RANGOON 00000585 003.2 OF 004

assistance came from the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation and the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries (using funding from the FAO). Only a few villages obtained diesel donations from the Ministry of Energy. Farmers in Labutta told us that each farmer must travel to the local Ministry of Energy office (located in Labutta, Ngapudaw, or Pathein) to petition for diesel; the Ministry of Energy would provide each farmer with three gallons per acre. Most farmers understood that fuel provisions were donations, although several people informed us that the Ministry of Energy may demand payment after the monsoon harvest.

Challenges to Planting

18. (SBU) While the farmers and village leaders welcomed the donations of seeds and farming implements, almost all of them expressed concern that it was not enough (Ref A). Village leaders lamented that the farmers did not have enough seeds, the seeds were not salt resistant, or the GOB had provided non-germinating seeds. Farmers in Gwe Chaung village complained that the Ministry of Agriculture only provided 1,500 baskets of seeds; however, they needed 3,400 baskets to plant 1,700 acres. Instead of buying seeds, the village elder planned to petition the Ministry to donate more salt-resistant seeds. Farmers in Kan Seik did not fare as well. They received 200 baskets of seeds, none of which had germinated, for 2,000 acres. Land-holding farmers planned to buy seeds from nearby village Chaung Wa, where seeds were available for 7,000 kyat (\$6.36) per basket. However, due to lack of cash, farmers had yet to buy seeds and instead were trying their luck by broadcast-planting the non-germinating seeds.

19. (SBU) Farmers also lamented the lack of draft animals to plow the fields: Gant Eik village lost more than 200 buffalo and 6 tractors in the storm while Gwe Chaung village lost more than 1,000 buffalo and 20 tractors. According to the Livestock Breeding Veterinary Department (LBVD) Deputy Director Dr. Than Htun, the Ministry of Livestock distributed more than 2,200 water buffalo and draft cattle to the delta and FAO distributed 600 water buffalo, replacing 1.2 percent of lost animals. Unfortunately, 105 cattle and water buffalo died in transit to the delta and 253 caught foot and mouth disease, Dr. Than Htun noted. Farmers also complained that some of the donated cattle were too young or too old to work the fields or did not understand the local language and thus were unusable.

110. (SBU) While the Ministry of Agriculture donated an estimated 5,700 power tillers to farmers as compensation for lost cattle, many of the farmers told us that they either did not know how to use them or they lacked diesel to power them. As diesel costs in the delta rise (currently between 6,000-6,500 kyat (\$5.45-5.90) a gallon), farmers will be unable to procure the necessary fuel, village

leaders noted. Even wealthier villages, such as Thaketa, where farmers could afford diesel, they preferred to wait because they believed that the GOB would donate the fuel. Farmers would rather spend money to feed their families, village leaders told us.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) Despite Burmese regime claims that delta farmers have successfully returned to the fields to plant the monsoon crop, we saw evidence that the yield will likely be significantly lower than normal. Many farmers lack the necessary implements to properly cultivate their land and the funds to purchase them. An infusion of

RANGOON 00000585 004.2 OF 004

cash into the hands of farmers could help them purchase diesel, farm implements, and germinating seeds. The August 1 planting deadline draws near, so farmers have a dwindling amount of time to purchase implements and cultivate the land. We will travel again to the delta to monitor the rice crop in late August, which should provide a better picture of actual cultivation.

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